

Interview with Leon Libeu.

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Interviewer: Will Griffen, U S F S

Transcriber: Phyllis Lotz

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

(United States Forest Service)

There is no introduction

000 Libeu: My mother taught at the Sisquoc, the Manzana Schoolhouse.

003 Her name was Bertha Annette Klein. She was a graduate of
Santa Maria High. The Klein Family, they lived in the
Betteravia Area, she was born there to a large family of
ten kids and she was near the middle. One of her older
008 sister, Louise married a man by the name of Wellman. They
homesteaded in the Sisquoc, and referred to as the Wellman
Place. They had one son, my cousin Henry Leo, who died in
012 1959.

013 Griff: When did Mr. Wellman settle in the Sisquoc?

Libeu: I am not certain, but I will guess that is was in the early
1890's because my cousin Henry Leo was born in 1893. My
mother stayed with the Willmans when teaching and rode
horseback to school. My father who was courting her at
the time gave her a 38 Colt revolver and she was a pretty
good shot with it, she would shoot rattlesnakes. I don't
remember how many students were there during her time, I
029 do know there were a lot of Davises, and I remember my
030 mother talking about the Foresters. I know when those peo-
ple went up to their places by wagon, they went straight
up the Sisquoc near the Olive and Tepusquet Canyon. How-
ever there was a great deal of socializing between the
people of the Sisquoc and Zaca Lake. I don't believe there
is too great a distance over there. Apparently there was
quite a lot of back and forth. My Aunt Louise knew my Uncle
John very well and also my father. A lot of people as I re-
member hearing them, going to the lake. The old Wellman
vineyard I am told, is still bearing grapes and they made
pretty credible wine, and if that is so I'm sure my uncle
John would have been interested.

059 Have you heard of Henry Able? He was a game warden in those
days. Had a son by the same name who is still alive and
living in Santa Maria. There was a long feud between Henry

Able the Game Warden and my Uncle John. At least the rumor on my side of the family was that John always won the argument that they had. By the way, Henry Able was a very honest game warden, he literally arrested his own brother-in-law for a game violation. A little fat man, I wondered how he could do what he did as he was an incredible shot. Absolutely incredible shot!

081 Griff: Do you know when that school house was built?

083 Libeu: No, I don't. Mother was only there a couple of years. She taught there 1903-04. As I recall my parents were married in 1906. That was the schoolteaching she did, and part at the Olive School where the Foxen Canyon leaves the Sisquoc. Before I forget it, I have been peddling my brain to think of anybody around who know more about this. Of all these people we are talking about, myself, my brother, family, the Davises, they were all older than I. I don't know if any are alive. I do have a number of cousins. John Libeu had five girls, I have lost track of most of them but I know where one is, her first name is Eulalie, which is a family name but I can't remember her last name. She lives in Medford Oregon, and she is well in her 70's. The whole of John Libeu's family were older than my brother and he was older than I. Maybe some of the Davis boys are alive. 106 I did know the Lonnie Davis family very well. I also knew 111 the Dal Davis family, he married Vera Kleine. Maybe some of 118 the Goodchild's are still alive. Also, Bob Easton, he did a hell of a lot of research on the area. When the school was abandoned or why I don't know. I think the why was because the Sisquoc Ranch was formed by Bob Easton and they bought out the homesteaders up there. The homesteaders had a different story according to my aunt, they were forced to sell but I don't know if that is true. They did sell around 1912 or 13 because my cousin Henry Leo was going to start high school and that was at that time. I remember in 1913 going to their house in Santa Maria. We went by horse and buggy there from Los Olivos and took the train to the Worlds Fair in 1913. I was around four. When the homesteaders sold out there was no longer a need for the school as the children had left. The same thing happened to the old Zaca School

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The school was located between the Fields Ranch, a guy named Davis owned it. Beyond that midway between the Fields headquarters and Zaca Lake was the school. It was necessary because of my uncle's five kids and the Fields.

And when they grew up the school disappeared too.

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Griff: Your father's brother owned Zaca Lake?

Libeu: The story of the ownership of the lake is another story. It is interesting. My recollection is that they homesteaded Zaca Lake, there were two homesteads, a total of 320 acres. In whose name the homesteads were listed I don't know but I imagine it was in my grandfather's name and uncle's but there was the understanding that my father had an interest in it. Somewhere my father's interest disappeared. He wound up with no interest in the lake, after my grandfather, old Jean Pierre, was killed in a wagon accident going up to the lake. The story was that they ran off the old grade and killed the old man. This was remarkable as this was in 1918 and he had been born in 1823 so he was 95 when he was killed. I remember him. He had salt and pepper hair, and he did not speak any English to speak of, and the reason was that he felt English would not last, it was not here to stay. We called him Pavou, or Patou, which means the 'great one'. After his death my uncle and his wife Kathryn split up and that is another story. Kathryn died about ten years ago well into her nineties. I saw her not long before her death.

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Griff: When did you say the homestead began?

Libeu: About 1890 I would say. I heard a story once that someone else had started the homestead and that they had failed to complete it or John bought them out, I don't know. John lived there until 1925, he died in March, 1926. He went out with a blaze, he was not a dull man. My father of course left the lake co-incidentally with his entering the Forest Service and getting married which was around 1905. We lived in Los Olivos. He became a ranger at Figueroa Mt. area. In those days the lookout was on Zaca Peak. It was changed in 1913 or 14. When they were married they moved to Los Olivos, probably in 1906 or 07. My brother was born in Los Olivos in 1907 in the house next to Sides Store. It is still there.

I too was born in Los Olivos in a house that is lived in now by Red Berry. He continued to live there until his death in 1927. It seems to me that when my father died he had served 22 years with the Forest Service. Prior to that before he entered the service, he did a number of things in addition to assisting at running the lake and I believe he was a rider for the Sisquoc Ranch. One time he was a bounty hunter for the Calif. lions. When I was four or five he would not hunt anything nor would he let my brother or I hunt anything. Except one time he did tell me to go out and shoot two quail, out of season, because my mother was ill and he wanted to make quail soup to help her get her strength back. He was one of the first conservationists. Those were the only quail I ever shot and the only ones he would permit being shot. He died a rather lingering death in 1927 at UC Medical Hospital. Curiously enough he died from blood poisoning. He fell off a guard station roof in the Sisquoc, where I don't know, but he bruised his leg badly and said nothing about it. Perhaps this was in 1923. His entire time was spent at Figueroa with only a short time at Los Prietos. His district ran from somewhere near Camino Cielo about Santa Barbara to the San Luis Obispo line. He was permitted to have a look-out on Figueroa Mt., a guard at Los Prietos, and a guard at the Cuyama and that was it. He was on sick leave when he died.

292 Griff: Your uncle John, did he farm at Zaca Lake?

Libeu: I don't know. He was a ranger too at one time. When he worked for the service I don't know, but there were lots of stories of the rangers. John Bat. sta Libeu, he was never a dull man, and one story was that in 1915 or so, the regional office sent out a notice that the ranger would not get paid a monthly salary, only on ~~days~~ days they worked and John was said to say, "from now on there will be no rainy days here." He was later asked to resign. He was highly educated and he made up his stories and people loved to hear them. My father did not go too often into the Sisquoc because it was controled by the Sisquoc Ranch and they would not let anyone in for years and years. I do remember very well riding with him on his summer patrols and going down the Davy

- 352 Brown and portion of the Manzana toward Hurricane Deck to a place called the Narrows. He would ride clear over to a place on Cachuma Mt., where a wonderful old Spanard had a homestead, his name was Gonzales. We would stay overnight there. On one occasion we camped near the Liboles, but we did not stay there, but went to McKinley Mt. , because there
- 360 has always been a legend of gold, lost Spanish gold mine there. I of course was familiar with the story and I looked all around there. There was a story of an old Spanard of Santa Ynez who could ride to the mine and be back in 24 hours with gold. My father had a vast collection of these stories and included the meanings of some of the Indian paintings in the caves.
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- 382 Griff: Was there a cabin there at Davy Brown?
- Libeu: Yes, I remember a cabin, no one was living there. There used to be a cabin where the two streams met called the Lonnie Davis cabin. The Dabney cabin was there but much later. The Dabneys were interesting people, local millionaires. Charles Dabney had two kids. They used to come to Zaca Lake and became close friend of Uncle Stanley[?]. They did have a cabin on the Manzana 2 miles upstream from the schoolhouse. I don't think they ever lived there as they were very wealthy, they may have gone in there at summer. They were very kind people.
- 400 I got shot in the eye in 1919 and as a result I had to go to Santa Barbara to the hospital to have the eye removed and word got out around so next morning the Dabneys were there and offered to pick up the whole tab. My family were poor but proud and would have none of it. I was shot in Los Olivos and in order to get to Santa Barbara you had to go to Solvang over Nojoqui and down the road. We left Los Olivos about 5 o'clock in the evening, me holding my eye, my mother holding me and the doctor. Dr. Edgar Smith was a splendid physician newly come to the Valley after World War I. We got to Santa Barbara about 2 a.m. driving in his Oakland 6 which broke down on the hill
- 455
- 460 The last strip of Hwy. 101 to be paved and the first of 20 foot pavement was the stretch between Los Alamos and Gaviota. It was finally completed over the Santa Ynez River , the first

bridge coincidently with the founding of Buellton, there was no Buellton before that only the Linnie Buell Ranch. We were an isolated community. I remember when the mails came from the north on the old P.C. railroad which butted its nose up the hill there and arrived when it felt like it. And from the south the mail came in by horse and buggy from Gaviota by way of Nojoqui, Alisal and Solvang, to Los Olivos and terminated in the Campbell Livery Barn. My mother and father bought a little store, the former Carl Whitcher store which was also the Post Office and the regulations were that the store had to be open when the mails came in. That store was robbed and burned in 1918 and things were tough.

The old blacksmith is a story in itself, that was "blowed-up", and he was. I heard it. It was colder than hell that night. I could hear him yelling, "my god, my god, I am all blowed up to hell," and he was. My brother and I tipped-toed across that frosty field to the shack where the roof had been blown off and part of him was still in the rafters. There was a big trial and they investigated my father because the old bird had tried to, he got drunk one time and forced his way into the store where my mother was, my mother ordered him out as she retreated around the counter to get her trusty 38, that I told you about, and the cash box. He stumbled over a stool and hit her as he went down. They formed a vigilante committee. Bill Snyder and myself had been swimming and when we got back, here was the old blacksmith who had barricaded himself and was yelling and cursing, about the Black Armenians, which I didn't know what he meant. He entered a plea of half guilty and the plea was accepted but he began having trouble with other people and he was finally blown up. 1923 I think it was. And they indicted Will Downs, Harvey Stonebarger and Bill Crawford and investigated my father. The Forest Supervisor at the time was Chester Jordan who was a brother of the Sec. of State for Calif. He learned what was going on and tossed the county investigator down the steps of the Federal Building in Santa Barbara and that ended my father's being investigated for the blacksmith's being blowed up.

The reason being that my father had been out of town, in Los Angeles on vacation. Such vacations that he got he had to tke them. And of course it had been planned months in advance. The trial was a bitter one, it did irreparable damage to Bill Crawford, he probably died because of it. Harvey Stonebarger lived on and died a year or two ago, and Will Downs lived on and died some years ago in his late eighties. Why the man was blown up? The defence theory was that he was fixing to blow up his neighbors which could been ~~ture~~ because he had threatened to do so. He was a wild guy. If you have time for one more story about him, you are probably familiar with the quick silver mines at Cachuma Red Rock. These mines are supposed to have been worked beginning back in Mission times. When I remembered them, Old Man Woods , I have forgotten his first name but his son was Charlie, and Old Man Dalton would go into the hills and be gone for months. Woods was a short man with a gimp leg and walrus moustache. He had a house where the Los Olivos school is now. His son was Charlie, a nice guy and older than we. We became very good friends. The old blacksmith liked mushrooms so he would get all the boys to hunt them for him and give the kids a nickel apiece for getting him some. The blacksmith's name was McGuire, but we called him McGimpy. Whether it was over the mushrooms or what, the blacksmith got mad at Charlie Woods and would tell people that he was going to shoot Charlie. Not long after that the father came out of the hills to buy supplies, I and Bill Snyder had been down swimming and were walking back up the hill and saw Old Man Woods coming down the hill and we knew because of his gimp, and he had an enormously long rifle, probably a Craig. He made a square corner around down to the store and the blacksmith shop was next to it. The blacksmith was shoeing a horse, when Woods says to McGuire, "I understand you are saying somthing about shooting my son," and the blacksmith stopped and did not say anything. Woods said if there was going to be any shooting, "lets you and I get about it." At that, McGuire hastily went into his shop and slammed the door and Woods went home.

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650 Griff: Do you have any information on mining activities in the
Fir or Munch Canyon areas?

Libeu: I don't recall anything about Fir Canyon and don't know
about Munch, but I do remember there were Chrome Mines up
there and they took some chrome out. It seems to me that
665 Bill Crawford had something to do with the chrome mines.
There was some production and this was around World War I
Did you know there was a saw mill on Figueroa Mt, at the
690 camp ground? Harvey Stonebarger set up a saw mill there
about 1912 or 13, and he sold lumber from it too.

697 End of Side 1, Tape 1

Begin Tape 1, Side 2

000 The old Kellogg house used to be inside the forest boundary
and actually my father used to raise most of his own hay
there for his horses. There was a barn there and a dug well.
That well was 30 feet from the ranger station, and south of
024 that was a very fine spring. Bob Easton somehow was a party
to a group that put together a photo album that was given to
us. I ran across it the other day and many of the pictures
are still in it and some were taken on top of Zaca Peak.
There are dates in there that are of interest. One was of
my uncle in clerical garb. He had once studied for the priest-
hood. And there used to be around the house a picture taken
039 in the Sisquoc at the Falls. I think there are two of a
ranger at Ojai and his name was Slossin(?). This would have
been about 1912 or 13. Both my father and uncle are in the
picture and in uniform so my uncle was still a ranger then.

055 I was born in Los Olivos in May of 1909 so I'm getting along
and don't remember things I should. I have not had the time
to think about these things since my brother's death and one
becomes rusty on things.

I told you about my uncle and the story of 'the pen being
mightier than the sword.' I first learned that by reading
the regional US Forest Service monthly bulletin. At that
time there were endless stories about stories credited to
John Libeu.

075 Griff: Were there any other people that you can think of other that the ones you have already mentioned?

Libeu: I don't know, probably there are. There was Tony Gonzales as I told you and a favorite memory was going to his place a getting jerky that was dust covered but my brother and I didn't mind. We would stuff our shirts with it and bring it home. I have often wondered what happened to him. Tony was a fine old man, a California Spaniard. He did not speak English so I did not understand him. There was a man named Bernard Tomata(?) at the Cuyama. We would ride up through Foxen Canyon, stay over night at the Castors(?) in the Tepusquet and then over the ridge to Bernard Tomasas. He lived on the river before you enter the Cuyama. Bernard married a Spanish lady, a lively old thing, I remember her well. They had no children. He had a typically French place up there perched on the hill. He would serve us a half cup of hot wine before we went to bed. It was supposed to help you sleep. He was a guard there for the Forest Service. He would go in work about April and bethere until Nov. The lookout for many many years was Zoilo Ontiveros on Figueroa Mt. He was a fine looking man. He never bothered using a glass his eye was good. He could see all the way to Lompoc. I remember the first building that was there on Figueroa Pk. about 1921, was a log cabin. We used to haul water up there by mule in a pack saddle. There was a raw-hide container to hold two 5 gal galvanized bottles on each side. That was how he got his water. He never came down off that mountain the entire season, he liked being there. His brother, Leandro had a place just before the Kellogg Ranger Station. Their father, the old patron in Santa Ynez was Patricio Ontiveros. My father was born in the city of Pau in the Basque section of France, near the ghrotto of Lourres. A number of Basques came from there to this region. The veterinarian in Santa Ynez is John Carricaburu. His father at times worked part time for the government. They are Basques and came from the same region. When my father spoke to Mrs. Carricaburu they spoke in English and I asked my father why he didn't speak converse with her in Basque. He toldme she does not know

French she knows Basque, he said, "it is better that I should know Chinese!" He was saying that he was raised with it but could not speak it.

My father as I am told came here in 1888. He was the youngest of the whole family and there was a whole mess of them. He came with my grandfather, Jean Pierre and a sister, Eulalie. They came at the salutation of John, who was then in Santa Barbara. John departed France to go to China to become a missionary. But he wound up in Santa Barbara. He wrote back and told the family how wonderful it was here and the old man brought the youngest son and youngest daughter, just picked up and left. They were not poor people. They had property and some of that property is still in the family. He was 65 and the reason was his oldest daughter who had raised my father had a large family and he felt left out. He was very attached to his oldest son, John. He had only two boys. My aunt (Eulalie) told me that she went to work as a French maid in Santa Barbara for 8 dollars a month. Somewhere along the way she married a guy named Massy(?), who was many years older than she. Her story was that she wound up in Santa Maria and established a French restaurant there, west of Main St. And she also built the Massy(?) Hotel that still exists. It was near the railroad where people would come to stay. I remember the restaurant, it served damn good food there and among the people who stayed there was A.P. Giannini who for ten years who was wrangleing his was finally founding a "BankItalia" branch in Santa Maria. He was barred for many years by national and state banking groups. They formed a lasting friendship that lasted until 1929. She sold this hotel a couple of times. Then she started playing the stock market and on Black Thursday, 1929, she and her daughter and friends were having breakfast in Madrid, Spain when the market crashed. And by her account, at the time she was within \$18,000 of being a millionaire. She lost 3/4 of a million dollars in the next three months. We did not see or hear from her for about 8 years and one day in 1935 her daughter turned up, and like all good French

people they had something in the mattress. They had gone to Los Angeles and my aunt died in 1969. Her daughter was a wealthy woman. She did not own one share of stock but had property. Her daughter Maria is still alive. She is probably 78 or 9.

Griff: What were the years that your aunt had the restaurant?

Libeu: Probably had that up to 1918 and she was a hell of a cook.

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End of interview